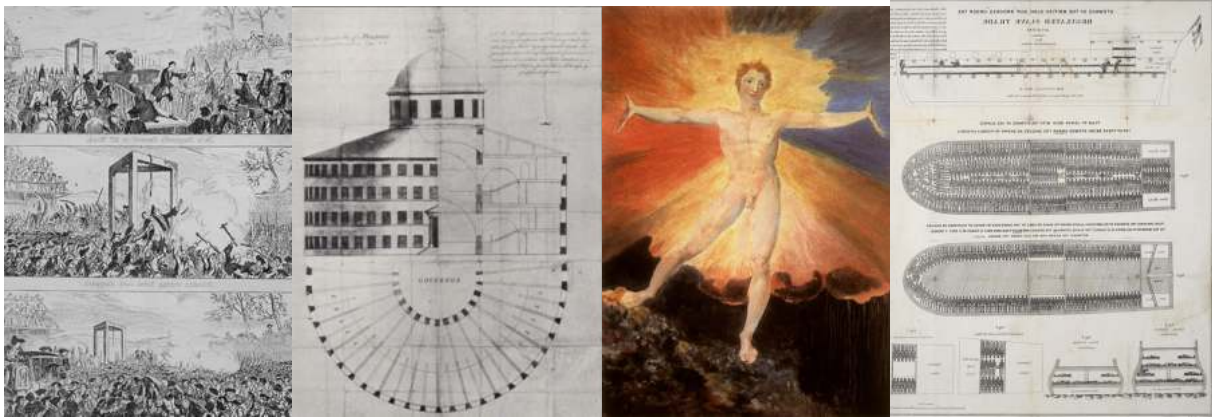


# ENGL 570: The Dispossessed Eighteenth Century

Prof. Ashley L. Cohen // Summer Session 2022 // MTW 11am-1:50pm ONLINE



When we think about the eighteenth century, we tend to picture gentlemen and gentlemen's daughters — the kinds of characters who might be in attendance at a polite country assembly in one of Austen's novels. When we tell a slightly different story about the eighteenth century—say, the rise of the middle class—this cast of characters expands slightly to include the London merchants and bourgeois professionals we find in the novels of Tobias Smollett and Daniel Defoe, and the coffee house prose of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Toss in the rakes, squires, patricians, and peers that we find in Pope and Richardson and all of these characters taken together still only account for the wealthiest 1% of eighteenth-century Englishmen (not to mention Britons).

In this class, our focus will be the remaining 99%: weavers and butchers, farmhands and swains, prostitutes and servants, highwaymen and housebreakers, chimney sweeps and child miners, the enslaved and the colonized. These are the protagonists of what some scholars have begun to call “the dispossessed eighteenth century.” They are the casualties of English capitalism's meteoric rise, the product of what is often called “development.” While it is true that processes of property accumulation, enclosure, imperialism, and industrialization resulted in the unprecedented enrichment of England's ruling classes, they also resulted in the pauperization and immiseration of the nation's—and empire's—laboring poor, its 99%.

We will take the eighteenth century as a case study in dispossession, reading foundational theorizing around the concept of primitive accumulation as well as new cutting-edge scholarship that puts dispossession front and center in eighteenth-century studies. The course will also serve as a kind of introduction to eighteenth-century literature, since we will read in a number of genres and forms, including plays, novels, poetry, criminal biographies, and political pamphlets. No prior coursework in the eighteenth century is required.

The syllabus will be collectively finalized during our first class meeting. Potential authors include: Daniel Defoe, William Blake, Jack Sheppard, John Gay, Henry Fielding, Oliver Goldsmith, Charles Brockden Brown, Ottobah Cugoana, Venture Smith, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Maria Edgeworth. Potential critics include: Karl Marx, David Harvey, Silvia Federici, Douglas Hay, Mark Neocleous, Jordy Rosenberg, Chiming Yang, Betty Joseph, Sal Nicolazzo, David Kazanjian, Christen Mucher, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Robert Nichols, Nick Estes, and many others. Potential topics include: enclosure, crime and criminality, the police, slavery and the slave trade, indigenous dispossession, and revolutionary politics.